Fine Feathers

Novelized from Eugene Walter's Drama by the same name.

By
WEBSTER DENISON

SYNOPSIS.

Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds move into their new bungalow—$500 down, balance same as rent!—on Staten Island. Mrs. Collins, a neighbor, calls before the household gods are set in order. Spring. Dick Meade, newspaper man, cynic, socialist, takes dinner and spends the night. The Reynolds seem comfortable in their home, but with a hint of loneliness. Jane Reynolds goes to a city matinee with Mrs. Collins and by her companion's advice pretends sickness to cover her neglect to provide dinner for Bob. Jane, confessing, is forgiven for shamming. Dick arrives with delicatessen forage. Dick warns Bob against John Brand, Bob's old schoolmate, now a member of "the system," who is expected to call.

CHAPTER V.

The Bird's First Plumage.

"Jane," Reynolds called, "come in and save us from devastation. The red ball is up and Dick is skating to perdition."

"Coming now," she answered, and appeared in a charming house gown. Charming it looked to them, anyway, and her husband embraced her.

"I know you'll excuse me, Dick," she said. "You're such an old friend that I don't feel I have to dress for you."

"Dress? What do you call that delightful delineation of sartorial art?"

"Art at $1.98 a picture, Dick. But I'm glad you like it. And it won't arouse any of your socialistic tendencies, will it?"

"Now, Jane, that's cruel. There's only one thing I condone in the members of the system and that is that they spend a good portion of their loot on their wives. I could almost forgive Bob for joining hands with the brigands if he did it for your sake."

She patted his arm. "Thank you, my doubly welcome guest," she said. "I always knew there was a grain or two of reason behind those vaporous dreams of yours. And this"—she helped herself to some of the tongue—"is another evidence of your practicality. What would we do without this rebel, Bob? I always put a ring around the Wednesdays on my calendar as the one day the sun doesn't set in this place."

Dick bowed. "Such eloquence, my dear hostess, or—guest, should I say?" and he indicated the array of pickled delicacies.

"Guest, if you will, Dick. You certainly saved the day. I never have been such an ungrateful wife in my life and I felt just terrible over it. I haven't been sick at all, but was so interested in the matinee and got home so late that I simply forgot all about the dinner."

"Ha," Dick exclaimed. "There you are; the system again; the theater. Another means of the robber class to divert the minds of the people from the real issue."

"I'll take a little cheese with that," Reynolds interpolated, "and give Dick some more beer. Hope is the system's deadliest foe. One stein and it is discovered; two, and it finds a worthy rival; three, and it is thwarted; four, it is vanquished, and five, it is obliterated. Dick, you should get a job in a brewery!"

"Hear hear!" replied the prophet. "The Messiah of a new creed is squelched by the proletariat. A great chance I have in this household. If I threw a bomb one of you would catch it and think it was candy."

"Jane," said her husband, "getting back to earth, I have a piece of news. The butcher called on me today. He came down to the office to dun me for my bill. Twenty-six fifty-eight, I think it was. You remember, I gave you the money Monday. I'd let it run over the month a bit, but that doesn't give him the right to ask for it twice. I told him to get out and when he got rude I threatened to throw him out. He said you hadn't paid the bill, but, of course, he was mistaken."

Mrs. Reynolds got up.

She made no reply to her husband.

"I thank you again, Dick, for this most welcome treat," she said. "You have certainly proved yourself a savior of domestic harmony."

She walked over to the window seat and donned her new hat. Then she came forward.

"Why, Jane, that is perfectly stunning," said her husband.

"Some hat, if you ask me," agreed Dick.

"Oh, I'm so glad you like it. Do you really think it is becoming, Bob? You know, it is the first one I have had for a year, I mean, a whole new one."

"I know," responded Bob, "you ought to have more of them. But what can a husband do when the system is against him? Pretty fine looking girl, eh, Dick?"

"Just as fine as they make them. Wouldn't she make a great queen of the Reds?"

"No, thank you," said Jane; "but I appreciate the proffered honor."

She stooped and kissed her husband. He looked up at her. "I tell you there must be something to that old proverb, 'Fine feathers make fine birds,'" he said.

"Something to it," answered Dick. "Nine million dressmakers live on it."

"You know, Bob," continued his wife, "I just had to get that hat. The old one had been twisted, and turned, and worn until it was almost falling to pieces."

"Yes, I know it. What of it? Why shouldn't you get a new one?"

"Well, Bob, there is another confession coming and I just won't fib to you. I saw this in the window, and I got reckless and lost my head, and—I didn't pay the butcher. But you won't be angry with me, now that you see how pretty the hat is, will you? I wanted it so bad and needed it, too, and I was afraid it would be gone if I wanted till I saw you and told you about it."

Reynolds looked distressed. He took two or three steps across the room and turned back toward his wife.

"No, dear, I am not going to be cross; I am just sorry, that's all. If I had the money you could have a million hats. I don't know anything in the world that would give me more pleasure than for you to have pretty things, for I know how dear nice things are to a girl's heart. But I haven't got the money, that's all. You remember when we were married upstate five years ago, we both agreed that what we wanted most was a home and we finally got this place. Now, twice a month they are at the door for the money, and if I should miss one payment we'd lose everything. I've never told you how hard it is for me to meet that obligation. I have met it so far, and if it comes through all right we'll have some part of this old Mother Earth. That's why I can't buy you hats. I'd like to, Jane, but I can't and I am sorry."

Truly repentant now, Jane walked to her husband's side and put an arm about his neck.

"I didn't know it was as bad as that," she answered sadly. "I'm sorry, too."

Dick looked gloomily across the table. "Doesn't it beat all how a little thing can knock the bottom out of the festive board?" he said. "Gee, this has just coppered my bun and ruined my socialism."

Reynolds walked to the window and stood looking out. He turned at length and, as if addressing himself, declared: "She looked wonderful in that hat. Why can't I dress her up and give her an even chance with those that are not half as pretty?"

Dick crossed to his friend's side and put his hand on his shoulder. "I have told you why, if you ask me, but you say I'm theorizing. Now, call it theory if you want to, but here you see a practical demonstration of it. The system doesn't allow you to dress your wives up unless you pay for it, and you can't pay for it unless you're in the system. Sometimes it dresses them up for you if they're pretty, but this particular case doesn't belong in that category. Now, you buck up, old fellow; we're better off here dipping into this cold relic of the plunderbund's generosity with nothing but this bungalow to cover us than all those big fellows put together. You've got love here, Bob, real love. When they imagine God does slip love to them it is stamped counterfeit from start to finish. With Jane and you living for each other as you do, you have got 90 per cent of all the happiness right here at home in this question mark of a house."

He stopped. Reynolds was smiling at him.

"All right, Bob; you're hopeless. If you can't stand a little socialism, even when it is mixed with romance, why let's wash the dishes."

The buzz of a halting automobile was heard outside. Reynolds stepped quickly toward the door.

"I guess that's Brand now, Dick."

"Then that's my cue to vamoose."

"No, you stay right where you are. There he is at the door."

"Hello, Mr. Brand," greeted Reynolds, as he threw open the door; "I'm glad to see you."

"Mr. Brand? Why not John? How are you, Bob?"

"First rate; let me have your coat and hat."

"Thanks; quite a long way out here, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, but we find it worth while after we get here. We enjoy the air and view very much. This is my country villa."

Brand laughed. "First one I've seen," he said, "although I own some stock in this company. Wish I had known you were buying this place, I might have saved you some money."

"Then I wish so, too."

Dick returned from the kitchen, where he had gone with some of the relics of the feast. He saluted the new comer and spoke cordially.

"How do you do, Mr. Brand? We meet again. Guess you're a little surprised to see me out here."

"No, not at all. One can expect to find a reporter anywhere, though you are a little way from home."

"It's sort o' home right here for me, Mr. Brand. I suppose you came to discuss some business with Reynolds."

"Why, not directly. You know Bob and I went to Cornell together and although it's a little late, I thought we might renew the acquaintance. We always had a pleasant sort of rivalry from geometry to football, eh, Bob?"

"Yes, indeed. You might call it that."

"Oh, what a memory," laughed Brand. "You see," he continued, addressing Dick, "he usually got the best of me, especially in athletics."

"I can believe that," Dick responded bluntly. "He is still pretty efficient in that respect. We amuse ourselves with boxing gloves now and then, and I can testify to his prowess. If you gentlemen will excuse me I will step down to the corner for awhile."

"Why?" inquired his host.

"Well, confidently, that old Dutchman nearly put me out of business a week ago and I have sworn revenge."

"How's that?" asked Brand.

"Pinochle. There is something coming over me now that feels like a hundred aces. If you want me, Bob, I'll be in that back room wrestling with a double deck, a fat Dutchman and a stein of Pilsener."

Dick stepped towards the door.

"Say, you had better put on your coat," suggested Brand, "it's cold outside."

The reporter turned with a smile and held out his hands. "No, thank you," he said, "I have my gloves. Good night."

"Known him long?" asked Brand as the door closed.

"Ever since Jane and I have lived here. He's the one close friend we have. Almost like one of the family, and whenever anything goes wrong he just sweeps in and clears up the sky."

"Yes, he seems like a jolly fellow, but he does a lot of talking. Where's your wife, Reynolds?"

"Lying down. She went to the theater this afternoon and it was a little too much for her."

"Any children?"

"Not yet."

"I've got three."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, I do say so. Two boys and a girl."

"A pretty good record," Reynolds commented.

"You're right. I'm rather proud of it."

"And you can afford them."

"Right again."

Bob arose and walked over the sideboard "Won't you have a cigar?" he asked as he searched for his surplus stock of mosquito killers in one of the drawers.

"Thanks, I don't mind if I do."

Bob tendered a cheap Havana which Brand lighted with difficulty.

"Say, John," inquired the host, "what ever became of Squinty Dalton? Remember him?"

"That little quarter back?" asked the millionaire casually.

He spoke in a bored sort of a voice as if the memory of the little freckled-faced hero of their school days was something to be flecked away, lightly as the ashes of his cigar. There was a time, however, when Brand's chest had swelled with pride because of this mite of grit and muscle had honored him with comradeship. Failing of athletic honors himself, it meant much to Brand—the friendship of these men; Reynolds, the slashing half back, who was a terror to the lines of the strongest teams, and Dalton, the greatest quarter of his day. As he glanced at Reynolds now, Brand saw something that recalled all this. He read in his host's face surprise and perhaps disdain for the veiled slight. So he asked in less scornful tone:

"Why, what made you think of him?"

"Oh, I don't know; he used to be such a pal of yours. Seeing you made me think of him and I wondered if you'd kept up the acquaintance."

"No, I haven't seen him in years. I don't think he amounted to much. It's funny how those athletic stars fall down when there is any real work to be done."

Reynolds laughed. "You don't expect me to stand for that, do you?"

"Why, does it hit home?"

"Maybe and maybe not. That depends on the point of view."

Brand puffed desperately at his cigar. He noticed that Reynolds had not joined him.

"What's the matter; don't you smoke?" he asked.

"Oh, occasionally."

Brand took out a handsome leather case.

"Try one of mine," he said. "I think you will like that. I have them made for me."

He arose, walked over to the buffet and, leaning an elbow against it, stood looking intently at Reynolds.

CHAPTER VI.

The System at Work.

John Brand was the incarnation of twentieth century prosperity; scrupulously, almost imposingly clean; immaculately groomed. Physically he would have passed muster anywhere. He was only thirty-five years old, yet he had the bulk that suggested not alone avoirdupois, but substantiality and maturity of mind. His keen gray eyes, the firm, decisive lines of his face, the poise and calm assuredness of movement, bespoke strength; absolute control of self and mastery of others. Inherent shrewdness was veiled behind a mask of genial good fellowship and frankness of speech. He was the type that any man conducting great enterprises would have welcomed as a colleague and feared as a rival. John Brand spelled success. He had sought it, encompassed it and corralled it. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest, he held sacred. It was his casus belli and his Bible. He apotheosized himself and his kind and actually believed the world was better off for the breed. Modern methods of manipulation and chicanery he looked upon, not as an impediment, but as an accelerating spur to progress. Failure was the only sin he knew.

He looked quizzically now at the cheap cigar his host had given him and then around at the modest furnishings of the room.

"You haven't been very prosperous since you left school?" he asked. "I had the idea that you had money up there."

Bob's cheeks burned. It seemed to him that Brand's address was not only businesslike, but unnecessarily blunt. But he answered coolly enough:

"No, you see, an old aunt of mine took care of my education. About the time I graduated she died. I've been working pretty hard trying to get along the best I could. I've married and bought this little home, but it's hard to keep it up."

The millionaire's answer to this statement was brutally sententious.

"Guess you can't be much of a business man," he said. "At least, buying this kind of a house the way you have isn't good business. I heard a fellow say one time that every installment you pay on your home or furniture is like putting a nail in the coffin of your hope, and I guess he wasn't far wrong. Not bad, eh?"

"No, not for millionaires; not for those who have got the price, but it's flippant foolery for those who haven't it. I know that I am paying more for this place than it's worth and that I'm helping some capitalist to put the screws down tighter. But it's the system that's wrong, Brand, not me. I want a piece of the earth to which I am entitled. I want to feel that there is something under my feet besides the pavement that your stock watered cement company built. Your cement will crumble up and blow away, but this half-acre of ground will be here for me and for my children. Why, any man who is worth anything in our social order of things has this longing for the soil. Everyone knows it; you know it. That's why you bought stock in the Utopian Land company. We're trimmed. Of course we are. We pipe and you sing, but how are we going to help it?"

The millionaire laughed. "I've heard that before," he answered. "Seems to me your friend Meade has made a convert. But wait"—he held up his hand to stop Reynolds' reply. "You asked me how you can help it. I'm going to tell you. You recollect that you were a pretty good friend of mine at school. Worked your heart and soul out trying to get me on the 'varsity eight and the eleven."

"Yes, and you didn't make them."

"There's that wonderful memory again. But, never mind. One good turn deserves another and I'm here for that purpose. I am a business man and I handle things from that standpoint."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Little Neck Asks New Name.

Believing that the name of Little Neck is too suggestive of a well-known clam, citizens of the town of that name in the borough of Queens, New York, have started a movement to have it changed. Herman Venske, a merchant, one of the leaders in the agitation, said: "The principal reason why I am urging the change of name is that when I go to Manhattan or Brooklyn the people ask me the price of clams. Then there is a place called Great Neck, beyond us, and strangers at once conclude that the place is greater than ours. Any other name would be acceptable to us. We don't care what we are rechristened."

One Thing After Another.

This year's sweet girl graduate is next year's gay debutante and the tired housekeeper of year after next.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By E. O. SELLERS, Director Sunday School Course, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.)

LESSON FOR SEPTEMBER 20

JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS.

LESSON TEXT—Matt. 25:31-46.
GOLDEN TEXT—Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least, ye did it not unto Me. Matt. 25:45.

I. The Congregation, vv. 31-33. This is one of the difficult and much-controverted passages of our Lord's Olivet prophecy. The title "Son of Man" is one which refers to our Lord's earthly relations and administration, and is one not otherwise used in this prophecy. Jesus is speaking to his disciples. He looks beyond the dark passion so rapidly approaching to the light of the ultimate fulfilling of his purpose for this world. Our Lord here makes no reference to the final judgment mentioned in the Apocalypse. In that hour earth and heaven will flee away. Here there is no such passing away nor do the dead appear. The son is enthroned. He administers judgment. He is assisted by the accompanying angels. The believer must appear before the judgment (II Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10), but his destiny is decided the moment he believes, John 5:24. Christ first came in humiliation, when he comes this time 'twill be in "glory" (v. 31). He may come at any moment, Matt. 24:42-44. This scene is more the description of a judgment than of a trial. The testing is taking place today.

Separating Test.

II. Those Commended, vv. 34-40. The separating test is the attitude of the nations toward the brethren of the Lord. Here Jesus emphatically speaks of his kingship, hence the honored position, "on his right hand."

In his teaching Jesus had emphasized the fact that those who do the will of God are his next of kin. Here they are, "Ye blessed of my father." This word "blessed" means, literally, "well spoken of." We are blessed of God in the heavenlies in Christ, Eph. 1:3, but we are also to be blessed with an inheritance in the kingdom. See Gal. 5:19, 21; Eph. 5.5; I Cor. 6:9, 10 contrasted with II Tim. 2:2; 4:8; James 2:5; Rev. 21:7. This blessing is a gift, Luke 12:32, which has been prepared "from the foundation of the world" (v. 34). Man's destiny depends upon the object and act of his faith, but the test, the proof, the evidence of that faith is in his conduct (Gal. 5:6; James 2:17, 18). Altruism does not save the soul, but a truly saved soul will be compassionately serviceable. It is ours to assuage the thirsty, John 4:14, 6:55; ours to feed the hungry, John 6:32, 35; ours to receive the stranger, Eph. 2:13, 18, 19; ours to clothe the naked, Isa. 64:6; ours to visit the sick, Luke 1:68, 78; and ours to visit the prisoner, Luke 4:18. Note carefully the unconsciousness of good deeds. The Christian is so identified with Jesus Christ as to regard these deeds as not his own, but "Christ within." The real test is not so much love for God or Christ whom we have not seen, but love for the brethren whom we have seen (I John 3:17). Our attitude toward our brethren is the evidence that we have received Christ. Our life of service, though we may be "the least," will be commended before the throne and the assembled nations and angels. He is identified with "the least." This sentence needs to be interpreted in the light of the entire scene and its relationship. Those commended are sent away into an age-abiding life of felicity.

The Other Side.

III. Those Condemned, vv. 41-46. Turning now to the other side, what a change we behold! "Come" is now "depart," not to age-abiding joy, but to age-abiding fire, which is age-abiding punishment. We do not infer that this parable refers to the place of the departed dead, to the final judgment of sin but to the time of his second advent and that the life that is blessed and the place of punishment are on this earth during the age of his millennial reign. Such at least is as far as we feel we have a right to go in the interpretation of this parable. Those who do not listen to the "come" of Jesus now, will hear his "depart" hereafter. Notice there is no reference to the father following the curse such as we find in connection with the "blessed." Men are cursed by themselves, John 5:40. Those who seek to save themselves are likewise cursed, Gal. 2:10. The kingdom is prepared for the righteous and punishment is not prepared for man. It was prepared for the devil (41) and his cohorts.